



THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR OF GERMAN HONOR STUDENTS REGARDING GARMENT AND ACCESSORIES

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Abstract: The purpose of this research was to determine the consumer behaviour of german honor students concerning branded clothes and accessories. The data acquisition was done by developing a questionnaire, which was sent to three different universities in Germany. The attention has been turned to identify a correlation between branded clothes and the development of a personal identity. According to the results of the realised survey there is no correlation.

Keywords: Consumer behaviour, students, brand, identity, fashion

1. Introduction

Understanding the consumer behaviour is the prime and toughest task for every marketer. The consumers, here the students, are making constantly new and varied experiences and get always influenced through their life. Some consumers get easier influenced than others and are changing more often. But in the end, everybody changes during their life time (Lancaster & Reynolds, 2002).

The social, personal, and cultural factors are factors which influence consumer behaviour. The students come from different social classes, are from different reference groups, have a different status and thus it makes it difficult to determine their consumer behaviour.

As a consumer you feel a need for satisfaction. This need is different for each person and therefore, any company or brand has to seek, to look and to identify what's the cause to become satisfied. As a result, the company or brand should set a goal to be always able to satisfy this need. Even more should the company or brand to be in the position to develop a trustful clientele which stands to the products of the brand just with positive attitudes (Lancaster & Reynolds, 2002). Generally, the brand is used for several aspects. It can be considered as aid of social integration and can get associated with the past of the consumer. For example someone who always wore in his past shoes from Adidas can get connected through the brand Adidas with the past. Largely, the brand reflect the self-identity of the consumer and therefore the consumer select a brand with which he likes to present himself in the outside world. When it comes to choosing a brand's product, this product is the property of the consumer (Mihalcea & Catoiu, 2008). But in choosing the product of various competing offers, the consumer gets unconsciously through five stages of the buying process. So, the buyer decision process consists of five stages which are: the need of recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and the post purchase behaviour

2. The youth

The youth is an inherent part of the youthful consumer culture. Therefore it is important to understand the youth and to see what is behind.

The youth is in a phase of life in which they leave their family of origin, and go out into real life. They enter the so-called professional life. Here, duties and responsibilities are waiting for them, which are part of the adult world. The 'growing up' means, that the youth tear themselves away from their parents and start to develop their own way of lifestyle and certain practices. This process of growing up is often happening across the culture of their peers, which serve for orientation. "Common interests, life philosophies, shared experiences and common problems create the basic for new forms of community, which largely function free of coercion and sanctions and where "membership" exists only in the form of a voluntary commitment on time." One speaks of so-called "groups". But in the age group 25- to 30-year-olds the youth find a social home "rather in a balked group of friends. Moreover comes, that they usually still have also a big number of acquaintances which have "rather a non-binding character" (Dr. Großegger, 2005).

But despite the "groups", the family remains the central reference group of young people. In the study of "Tatsachen über Deutschland" (Geißler, 2008) are specifying 72 percent of 12- to 25-year-olds are specifying, that a family is needed for a happy being. Nearly all 12- to 29-year-olds indicate to have a very good and trusting relation to their parents. Dr. Beate Großegger (2004) adds in her article "Werte in einer Welt der Alternativen" that even friends belong to a family.

2.1 The value of the youth

Mag. Heinzlmaiers (2007) searched in his study „Jugend unter Druck“ what are the values of the youth. This means what kinds of things are important for the youth and adults (students). It was found out that for the students a good education is necessary. This doesn't surprise because they indicate that also a good job, career and enough money is of importance for them. All these statements are associated with each other. Further, they declare that good friends play a big role in their life. They say that friends are persons, where you can rely on. Likewise they state that another major factor is to have a good relationship with the family and the parents. Also a faithful partner counts as a factor. Additionally the youth and the adults indicate that to be independent and to can relax beyond the stress of performance is important for them.

2.2 Students concerning social and environmental engagement

A high interest of the students lies in the social and environmental area. In the study of "Tatsachen über Deutschland" (Geißler, 2008) about three-quarters of all young people indicated that they exert themselves for the following social and environmental concerns: older people in need of care, the environment and animal protection, the poor and migrants or handicapped persons. In the contrast to it, the interest of the students in politics is tending to decline.

2.3 Students concerning politics

As mentioned above, the interest in politics is tending to decline. In the study "Tatsachen über Deutschland" (Geißler, 2008) the author indicates that 44 or 64 percent of young adults and students express political interest. It is also stated that the youth is in a so-called "traditional left-right-scheme" rather more in the left to classify.

Similarly in the study "Jugend unter Druck" (Heinzlmaiers, 2007) it is shown that politiccs are not important for the adolescents and young adults. But he goes further and speaks of the fact that the young people believe that the economy wins rule about the politics. With it Mag. Heinzlmaiers (2007) gives the figurative example that the politicians are like puppets of the managers. In the outside world they seem powerful, but in reality the managers behind are those who are powerful and who have got the power.

3. The meaning of clothes and the value of accessories

Fashion is the generic term for the elements clothing, accessories, makeup, etc. Any combination is possible and therefore it is considered by many as a kind of art. (Nellis, n.d) Fashion is a process. In this process there are for a limited period certain design and products as “in” marked. This phase will continue till new design and new products will replace it. (Saviolo, n.d)

The clothing is a part of fashion. It is used for functional purposes, such as protecting the body from cold, from harmful chemicals and others. However, also clothing is used because of social reasons (Fashion definition). Through fashion and clothing, people can express different opinions and even more themselves. They can expand their personality as well as to hide themselves behind the clothes. Fashion is versatile and can be used by everyone in different ways. (Nellis, n.d)

Accessories complete fashion. They include bags, shoes, earrings, etc. Via accessories a person can make the outfit to shine and also to change the look of it. For example if several people are wearing the same outfit combined with different accessories than the outfits are looking different. Accessories also serve for weaknesses of clothes and problems of the body to hide it from the viewer. With clothes and accessories information can be found about the social status, religion, marital status, and so on. But the people have to use rightly the so-called “code” rightly, so that no false statement will be understood by others and therefore it does not lead to an unwanted response from the others (Fashion definition, 2009).

4. Consumer behaviour

The consumer behaviour is an important issue. To be able to understand what it is behind it is recommendable to deal with the „stimulus-response model“.

The “consumer behaviour is the study of how individuals, groups, and organizations select, buy, use, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants.” Every individual has his needs to get satisfied. To find out what brings satisfaction to every individual every brand or company has always to do look, to search about it, and with that there is meant the consumer behaviour. But this is not such easy, because the consumer behaviour is influenced by three factors (Kotler, 2006).

Cultural, social, and personal factors are influencing the consumer behaviour, in which the cultural aspect, has the highest effect on the individual as a consumer. It includes the aspects of culture, subculture, and social class.

4.1 Cultural factors

“A culture is the complex of learned values and behaviours that are shared by a society and are designed to increase the probability of the society’s survival.” It is the basic of the behaviour and wants of the individuals. The main cultural values differentiate through countries, because every country concentrates on other core values. To specify more the diverse population of every country it can be divided into subcultures. “Subcultures include nationalities, religions, racial groups, and geographic regions.” It means that the person’s behaviour and interest on a good is caused by the nationality, religion, race, and geographical region of the person. For example a person comes from a subculture, which is focused on a good living, it is assumed, that the person is interested in products with quality. Therefore it can be that the person comes from a subculture with a value on high-class-products, which help the marketer to define the person interest in products with quality (Kotler, 2006).

Another section of the culture factor is the social class. Every person can be classified into a social class, like for example middle class, working class etc. Social classes are “relatively homogeneous and enduring divisions in a society, which are hierarchically ordered and whose members share similar values, interests,

and behaviour.” But as well different selections including clothing, leisure activities, and patterns of saving and spending are made by individuals of different social classes. If one observes the social class of a university student the marketer should not focus on the side job of the student but rather on the target carrier and on the occupation of the parents (Churchill & Paul Peter, 1998).

4.2 Social factors

With the social factor is meant reference groups, family, and roles. There are three types of reference groups namely membership groups, aspirational groups and the dissociative groups. The family and the peer groups are membership groups. The membership groups are positive groups with which a person is ongoing connected rather where the person a member of this group is. To the membership groups a person feels to belong, identifies himself with the group, and feels especially drawn to the group. To the positive reference groups belong also the aspirational groups. In these groups also one person feels drawn to the group and identifies himself with the group as well. But in opposition to membership groups aspirational groups are groups such as desired social groups, celebrities etc. where the individual is trying to become a member of. The dissociative reference groups are negative groups. With it, the individual want not to be linked and not to get identify. (Mihalcea & Catoiu, 2008)

The family is the most significant group influencing the buying behavior of consumers in society. In the literature they distinguish between family of orientation and family of procreation. The family of orientation consists of one’s parents. They influence the unconscious behavior of the buyer. Even more, if the grown child still lives at the parents’ house. The family of procreation consists of husband, wife, and children. They are the most important group and marketers try to find out the roles and relative influence of this group concerning the purchase of a large variety of products and services. For example the increasing number of working wives is an important issue for marketers, because it forces the husbands to go more shopping. Hence it is important to find out which member of the family has the greatest influence in choosing products. Besides family, an individual participates in many other groups such as clubs and organizations. Each position the person has in the group can be defined by terms of role and status. A role means hereby the activity that a person is expected to perform. A status is that what a role carries. Hence, people choose products that communicate their role as well as the desired or their actual status they have in society. This forces marketers to be aware of the status symbol potential of products especially of brands. (Kotler, 2006)

The role of a person is combined with the status of that person in the society. The role and status define the position of the person in a current situation. For example if somebody is occupationally gardener he has a lower status as somebody who is manager. But every individual plays different roles in the society. This means that the one, who is gardener could also have the role as a father, could be in a political organization etc. Thus, the person plays different roles and each role is influencing the buying behaviour and is assigned with a status. (Lancaster & Reynolds, 2002)

4.3 Personal factors

A buyer’s decisions are influenced by personal characteristics such as age and life cycle, occupation, personality, lifestyle and values. People buy different things during all their lives. Food, clothes and recreation is always changing with age and life cycle. Occupation also influences their lives. Marketers try to identify all the groups so that they can have interests on their products. Choosing something to buy is different during their lives because of the economic circumstances. Personality can be a useful variable in analyzing consumer brand choices. “Brand personality” is defined as the specific mix of human traits that may be attributed to a particular brand. Consumers choose their own brands in what concerns their personality. A person who lives in the world with a lot of activities, interests, and opinions has got a lifestyle, and marketers search for relationships between their products and lifestyle groups. (Kotler, 2006)

5. Buying decision process

The first step of this process is the “problem recognition”. In this step the consumer realises a need or want of a product. But the decision, which product, brand, and shop he/she should buy, might cause a problem for the consumer. The consumer may have an idea of the desired or required product, which he wants to purchase. But before buying it, he probably needs to search information’s about the product and herewith the consumer is passing the second stage of the buying decision process, named the “information search”. When the consumer doesn’t have a clue of this kind of product, or the product is expensive, the information search can be time-consuming. Sources for finding information can be the internet, the manufacturers, the family, the colleges, or other. These sources can have a high influence on the consumer but it depends on the consumer and on the product itself. During the information search the consumer narrows down some alternatives by separating out for example too expensive products for him. Herewith the consumer gets to the third step, named “evaluation of alternatives”. The consumer uses information to evaluative the alternatives and compare them by their features like quality, design, and price. After this screening he chooses the product, which seems to be the best. However, sometimes the consumer does not buy the one he intended. This can happen because the chosen product is eventually too expensive for the consumer, so that he is obligated to choose a product of a cheaper brand. Further the consumer arrives to the fourth step, called “purchase decision”. In this step the consumer finally decides which product he wants to purchase. The goal of his decision is that the product brings satisfaction and possible risks have been avoided. These risks can appear for example when the consumer decides to buy a too expensive product. In this situation a feeling of anguish appears, which helps to take the right decision in the end. The fifth and last stage is called the “post-purchase behaviour”. In this stage of the process the consumer takes further action after purchase. This behaviour is determined by the facts, if the consumer is satisfied or dissatisfied and this is further determined by the consumer’s expectations. Dissatisfaction can be caused for example through advertising, which might create too high expectations concerning a product. Every marketer should know that also a good product could take a negative effect as a result of word to mouth. These can be started through dissatisfying consumers which had too high expectations through advertising campaigns and were dissatisfied after the purchase. Thus, the marketers have to take care that before the final purchase occurs they try to reduce the aversion of the brand. (Lancaster & Reynolds, 2002)

6. Brand

„A brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.“

By creating a unique name, logo, symbol, design etc. the company develops a brand. This brand gives to consumers any kind of promise. So it gives a reason to the consumers to get connected with the brand (Defining a brand, 2009). Through the brand name people associate something of themselves, of their lives, to it. It causes a positive feeling in their mind and influences their buying behaviour (Gobé, 2001). By building a strong positive image, through communicating and keeping this promise associated with the brand, the company assures for itself a successful long term position in the market. (Batey, 2008)

6.1 Brands regarding consumer behaviour

As defined above, consumers identifies themselves with a brand and influences at the end their buying decision. The consumers want to achieve certain goals for themselves, they try to find, and choose the brand that they think it can help them with it. To define and develop the self-concept of the consumer, companies try to change a brand into a symbol in the consumers mind. (Mihalcea & Catoiu, 2008)

Thus, products are not only purchased because of their function, but also for the things for which they stand for. To understand how this meaning gets into the product the “McCracken model of meaning transfer” has to be explained. In this model it is assumed, that initially the meaning gets created by the

society. Through word of mouth, reference groups, fashion systems, celebrities, media, and sub-cultural groups the meaning reaches these products. If the brand image concurs with the self image, the meaning will pass to the consumers mind. So, the consumer chooses a product of a brand which contains a brand image that fits to his image. But brands differ. There exist brands which are slightly more capable to say something about a person which is using this brand, than others. Through luxury product or products which already are on the market, it is easier to transmit the symbolic meaning to the persons. But there are also brands, with a high visibility that are also used from many different people, which are not capable to give a statement about a person. This is, because of the high number of different individuals from different layers, scenes etc., which purchase that brand and make a clear statement not possible (Mihalcea & Catoiu, 2008).

7. Questionnaire

Doing a questionnaire is just one of the several methods in the market research to get information from the people to a subject. There are questions, which receive in each case several finished answers, so that the respondent just has to tick Yes/No, Important/Not important and so on. These are consciously fixed by the researcher, so that he can find out to which answers each person of the desired target group agrees even more responds. On the question wording, there are different possibilities (Gillham, 2000).

Basically there are open and closed questions but also mixed forms. Open questions are questions, where no answers are given. This means that the respondent has to write on his own an answer. This can be advantageous, because the respondent is now free to decide what he wants to write. But it also can be a disadvantage for persons which have problems to express themselves by writing. Generally open questions are not recommendable, because they are difficult to get analysed. In addition to open questions are closed questions easy to analyse. These are questions where the respondent just has to tick for an answer one of the boxes which are already ascertained (Dr. Aschemann-Pilshofer, 2001).

Therefore "The most questionnaires are composed entirely of closed questions". But to closed question there are different kinds to create the answers. It is not just the Yes or No answer, but also the answer in a scaled or ranked form. With it, the persons have to make an order of their preference for example by numbering the several assertions. The ranked responses are helpful to achieve a preference judgment of the respondents. Another way of drafting answers is the scaled responses. There the persons have to tick one point between the usually five-point scale (Gillham, 2000). This response you have to use if you are looking on a rate of agreement to a specific statement. But an important issue at scaled responses is the fact that the rating-Scales should have linguistic characteristics with the same distance Rohrmann (1978) shows in his investigation the following linguistic characteristics with the same distance:

Frequencies: never – infrequently – occasionally – often – always

Intensity: not at all – hardly – middle –fairly - extremely

Probability: under no circumstances – probably not – perhaps – quite probably - certainly

Evaluation of statements: completely wrong - very wrong - a draw - quite rightly - absolute right

Returning back to the third and last opportunity to draft a question we have the mix form. With it, the respondent can tick one of the following boxes, but also has the alternative to fulfil his answers with the last box "Other" where he can write his own thought as an answer. (Dr. Aschemann-Pilshofer, 2001)

8. Findings and interpretation

After the research it was considered what kind of questions could be relevant for the questionnaire to determine the following subject "The Consumer Behaviour of the German honours students regarding garment and accessories." First of all there was provided a mind-map and out of this mind-map were formed several, potential questions. After multipurpose modification and elimination of the various questions with the background knowledge how to develop a questionnaire.

A control question was inserted to ensure that the respondent answered truthfully. The control question is the question 19 of the questionnaire (Figure 1) in relationship of question 29 (Figure 3).



Figure 1. Control question

A) < 5% B) 5% - 10% C) 10% - 15% D) 15% - 20% E) > 20%

According to the findings of the questionnaire, it is found that 29% of the German students have an income between 200 and 400 Euros. Also 29% of the German students have an income between 400 and 600 Euros. 19.4% of the students have their income between 600 and 800 Euros and 22.6% of the students have an income over 800 Euros (Figure 2).

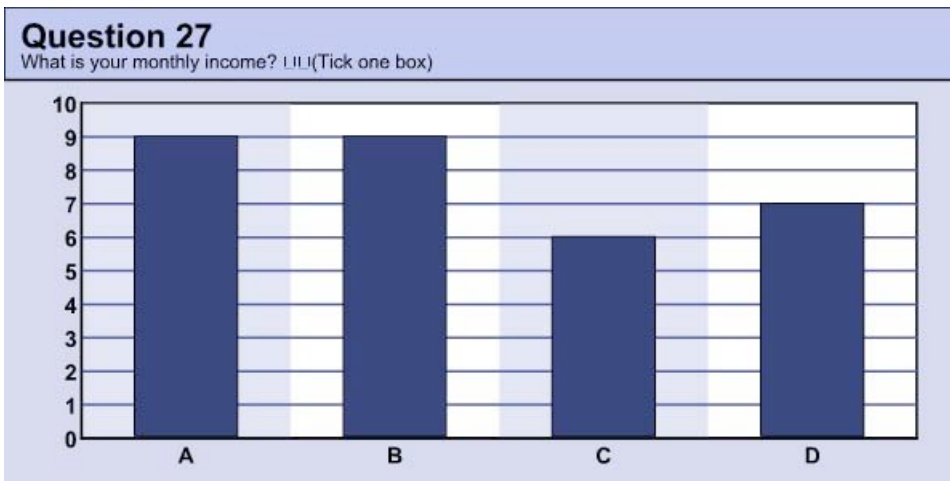


Figure 2. Monthly income

A) 200-400 Euro B) 400-600 Euro C) 600-800 Euro D) > 800 Euro

29% of the German students spend between 40 and 60 Euros monthly in clothes and accessories. 22.6% spend between 20 and 40 Euros monthly in clothes and accessories. Between 60 and 80 Euros and also between 80 and 100 Euros spend 12.9% of the students for clothes and accessories in the month and 16.1% of the students spend more than 100 Euros monthly. 6.5% of the students spend less than 20 Euros monthly in clothes and accessories.

Further it was send to an unknown number of students in Germany. The questionnaire was primarily passed to three universities in Germany namely to the universities of Dortmund, Köln and Münster. But after a three week waiting period the questionnaire remained unanswered. Thus, the researcher started to

send the questionnaire to friends and asked them to pass the questionnaire to further student friends forward. This process has succeeded and therefore an answer result was reached of 43 persons. However, it is not clear how big the number of persons is who have received the questionnaire.

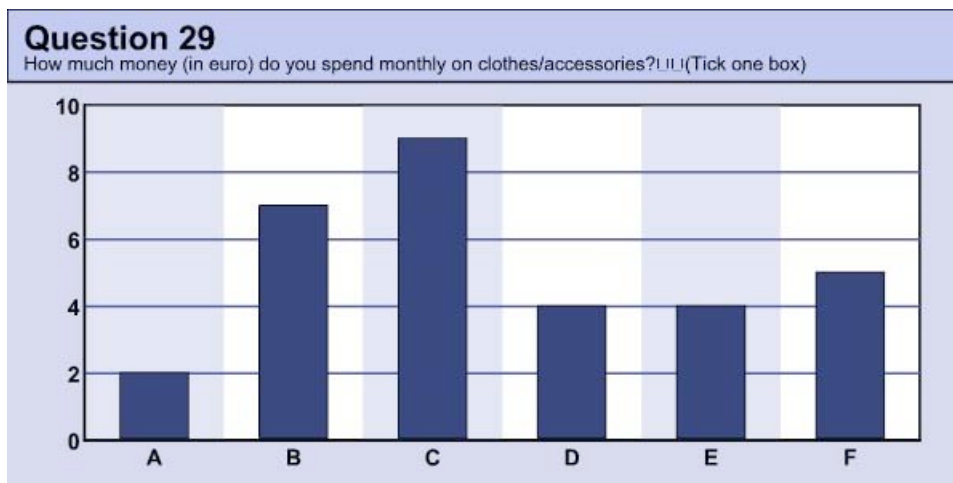


Figure 2. Monthly expenditure on clothes/accessories

A) < 20 Euro B) 20 – 40 Euro C) 40 – 60 Euro D) 60 – 80 Euro E) 80 - 100 Euro F) > 100 Euro

It is to mention that the questionnaire was not filled completely until the end by some people starting in question 17. Thus, it is to note that from question 17 just 32 students continued answering the questionnaire. This can be due to the fact that in the end the socio-demographic data were questioned, and many of the respondents failed to say something about their for example monthly personal income. Equally it can be suggested that the questionnaire was too long as well as not enough motivation was transmitted, so that toward the end the respondents prematurely aborted the questionnaire. But this presumption is contradicted with the executed pre-plan. In the pre-plan 14 different individuals were selected by the audience. All of the 14 test persons reported that the processing time was acceptable and they enjoyed fulfilling the questionnaire. Actually only linguistic mistakes were changed and some set points added.

9. Results

The average German student of this survey is fashionable, between 23 and 26 years old, dresses either casual or street wear, lives in a large city of at least 500 000 habitants. His monthly income is between 200 and 600 Euros mainly financed by wages, salaries, parents, or student loans. He spends between 20 and 60 Euros per month, respectively 5% to 10% of his income, on clothes and accessories. For him accessories have an equally large role as clothing. He buys clothing and accessories if he likes something, but just if he is able to make a decision. He goes mainly shopping alone or with friends, who are also besides work or other sources his main influence factors. He doesn't belong to any social scene. He adopts the newest trends from friends, advertising and from people on the streets. But in contrary his friends' opinion is not very important for him. He obtains his clothes from stores, the web, or shopping malls, here mainly P&C. He purchases mainly branded clothes like H&M and Zara. For accessories and shoes he chooses also H&M and additionally Adidas and Converse. But branded clothes do not necessarily lead to a higher level of confidence or emotional satisfaction. Shopping makes him usually happy but his buying behaviour depends occasionally and often on his momentary mood. That corresponds to his spontaneous buying behaviour and irregularly shopping times. That accords with rejecting the "special offer" season as his main shopping period. Of particular importance for him are price, quality, and design. Although values like environmental friendliness, human rights, and fair terms of employment are of subordinate role. He admits his fairly

influence on working conditions and social surroundings. In contrast to that his consumer behaviour has in his opinion no influence on politics, sports, and show business.

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